

## **Illinois Lawmakers Disagree With Governor On Life-Saving Pills; Potassium Iodine Pills Could Help In Nuclear Terror Attack**

by NBC 5

The federal government is stockpiling pills that could save lives in a nuclear terrorist attack. Some ask why they are not being distributed in Illinois?

The pills are free from the government, but Governor Ryan has rejected Washington's offer to hand them out. Now an Illinois congresswoman and state representatives plan to force the governor to provide the pills to residents.

Potassium iodide tablets should ideally be taken before any exposure to radiation, but some experts say they can be effective hours afterward. That is why some legislators are challenging Governor Ryan's decision not to make the national stockpile available to people in Illinois.

The small white potassium iodide tablets cost less than a quarter apiece, but some experts say they can protect your thyroid gland from the effects of nuclear radiation.

Dr. Arthur Schneider, University of Illinois-Chicago, said: "If you take a potassium iodide tablet, the radioactive iodine cannot enter because the tablet has blocked the radioactive iodine."

In the wake of rumored terrorist threats against nuclear power plants, the federal government is making the pills available to states for no cost but so far, Illinois--the most nuclear state in the nation with five reactors--has declined the offer.

Illinois Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky is outraged: "Governor Ryan, what could be your motivation for refusing to give Illinois families a small but effective measure of protection in case our worst fears come true?"

But the Illinois Dept. of Nuclear Safety says the rationale is clear. In the event of any nuclear problem, it plans to evacuate people who live near the reactor.

In a statement to Schakowsky's office, the state explained that stockpiling of potassium iodide or 'ki' tablets for the general public increases the likelihood that people will use the drug inappropriately and subject themselves to potential radiation exposures that otherwise would be prevented."

Schakowsky: "That is simply ridiculous ... Don't we expect Illinoisans to be a little more sensible than that. They will take their pills and head for the hills."

But one nuclear expert says those evacuees could wind up being the first affected.

David Kraft, Nuclear Energy Information Center, maintains: "Where the weather changes, the traffic jams, you can't get out quickly ... if those people don't have potassium iodide in their system, they will be zapped."

Right now, potassium iodide tablets are available on the Internet, and the Governor's office says discussions about making it available statewide are ongoing.

The state says it hasn't closed the door on ki, but there are a ton of logistics that need to be worked out. Of the 34 states with nuclear reactors, only five have taken the federal government up on its offer.

In addition to logistical problems, they cite concerns over children taking the tablets which were intended for adults.

Experts says an overdose of potassium iodide could cause thyroid problems.